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ABSTRACT

Often approaching reading with feelings of stress, anxiety, and fear, disabled readers need affective as well as cognitive training in remedial reading programs. Their intellectual objectivity, self-understanding, and rapport with teachers and classmates could be increased, and their anxiety reduced, if remedial reading specialists would incorporate psychotherapeutic strategies into classroom learning activities. Based on Gestalt and Ratio-Emotive therapy, and Cognitive-Behavior Modification, these exercises range in applicability from elementary to college level, and include writing activities to help clarify feelings and formulate goals, step-by-step work in problem solving, and circle games to highlight group interdependence. (MM)

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"Some Psychotherapeutic Schools and Strategies Applied to Remedial Reading"

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"....Who in the rainbow can draw the line where the violet tint ends and the blue tint begins? Distinctly, we see the difference of the colors, but where does the one first blendingly enter into the other?..."

H. Melville from Billy Budd

INTRODUCTION

At the present time, the functions of Reading Specialists engaged in working with problem readers, are mostly limited to the "curative" function or duties essentially of an instructional nature. There is little sign of change toward directions which might involve more holistic and dynamic treatment; yet, this could open a whole range of new modes of teaching and learning. Like the rainbow, these tints, when examined, seem paradoxically separate, as well as also emanating one from and into the other. A direction in Remedial Reading, which seems worth pursuing, is an examination of a future role for the remedial reading specialist, as therapeutic agent in the establishment of new learning environments where transactions might integrate two paradoxically-related areas, the cognitive and the affective. To make such an examination would be to acknowledge the problem reader and the remedial teacher as whole persons, integrated individuals who interface with their environments as both thinking and feeling beings, individuals who interact and experience mentally and emotionally in unison.

THE CHART IS NOT THE PATIENT

The slogan that "the chart is not the patient," could be made analogous to the notion that "the I.E.P. is not the cure." These slogans have deep implications, because the field of reading--particularly in this era of so-called "diagnostic/prescriptive teaching"--is so particularly ripe with opportunities to create much unnecessary stress and anxiety for children and adults in the course of well-meaning efforts. As examples of what we tend to do all too frequently:

1. Rigid expectations of pupils in reading performance.
2. Weak, subjective, and summary diagnostic reading decisions which often become "diagnosgenic."
3. Unrealistic, non-functional and often molecular testing and learning tasks, which are too often "iatrogenic."
4. Unexplained "outer-directed" purposes for lessons and misunderstood assignments in reading.
5. Punitive and judgmentally-based grading and retention practices.
6. Insensitivity to failure-producing experiences in reading and stress reactions resulting from these.
7. The use of fear-producing labels and dependency eliciting forms of special help.
8. De-personalized testing and placement procedures.
9. Abuse of potentially useful reading experiences.
10. Misuse/overuse of potentially useful commercial instructional material.

The specialist who is a remedial reading teacher should be sensitive to the patient as well as the chart; for the remedial teacher, the "hidden" feelings of her charges reflect what has happened to them and what still is happening. As a colleague in Clinical Psychology said in a presentation to one of our reading classes when referring to childrens' emotions, how this reminds him of the line from an old song, "Her lips said 'no, no, no,' but her eyes said 'yes, yes, yes.'"

THE HEALER'S ART

To gain the confidence of a child, another teacher or a parent, might--or might not--be an untutorable quality. To participate in helping another human being, in this case, a poor reader, alter his habits, styles and attitudes, is part of "the healer's art." We have not yet tapped into this systematically in the field of remedial reading. The Affective Domain is the illegitimate child of our profession. Indeed, the word "healing" today in most professional circles, would be associated with "charlatanism" or "quackery." In this age of logical positivism, talking about "healing," is treading on dangerous waters.

And yet, it seems to me that there needs to be a re-examination of the remedial teacher/problem-reader relationship. Such a change might essentially involve integrating the traditional "curative" function with what could be referred to as a "healing" function. Each of these represents synchronistically both distinct and inter-related aspects of problem readers' situations.

The "cure" could be seen as the technical aspect of improving reading, those parts mostly concentrated on, in graduate education

programs badly, adequately, or quite skillfully as the case might be. "How to" correct, "With what" and "Where" are questions posed in the curative aspect.

The "Healing" function involves subtle psychological aspects which address "when, why," and perhaps for "which" reasons, such treatments as these are not often considered. They deal with aspects and characteristics of problem readers who could be among other things frightened, anxious, stressed, dependent individuals with feelings of being "unfit" as persons for what school and perhaps even life seems to be for and about.

For some disabled readers, pupils who are so handicapped by reading problems which have made the world of possibilities problematic, they face situations that now reflect reduced chances for recognition, esteem and acceptance. These pitifully feeble moves are not working and school could become a place which he/she has disconnected him/herself from. Hopelessness could prevail and he will give up in trying to cope with unrealistic teacher expectations, no less sustain attention to tasks beyond his ability to accomplish them. This becomes particularly so if the problem is severe and chronic. A sense of control over his destiny is gone and sometimes severe behavioral reactions ensue.

We believe that problem readers can be helped more effectively and efficiently if both the curative function is technically superior and if the "healing" function is present in the awareness of the teacher and integrated systematically into the process of teaching and learning.

We have begun a quest, now, to examine the healing function. This presentation is a brief trip into some things I have learned, some useful concepts from several selected schools of psychotherapy. These concepts are discussed solely with the intent of encouraging further study, graduate training in appropriate disciplines, and careful experimentation.

The "universals" underlying each of these psychotherapeutic schools are that pupils might acquire: emotional support; intellectual objectivity; relief of stress and anxiety; insights; skills and independence and control over their work and experiences in school. The strategies which are outlined here are not for casual use as a set of word-study, comprehension or study/skill exercises might be perceived to be.

No one should use these if they have any personal feelings of uneasiness, uncertainty, or doubt about either his/her own skill to properly handle unexpected pupil outcomes, unhappy parental or administrative perceptions, and/or potential injury (physical or psychic) to young people who should not perhaps be involved in such activity without trained leaders.

One should know the students who might be considered for these activities. Any youngsters with manifest or potential psychological and/or physical problems should be carefully considered. The question as to whether certain of these activities should be used should always be decided in the negative if there is even the slightest doubt.

Citations for each of the strategies are available here and those who are serious about exploring these are urged to read, study, take courses and expand their teaching skills repertoire

in these areas. The major psychotherapeutic schools from which these strategies came are listed separately. Proper use of these strategies is working with them in the company of a counselor, psychologist or individuals trained in mental health professions. Be open and honest with yourself, examine your motives, goals and attitudes to your pupils before working with these activities. Be flexible, positive, tolerant and open to their possibilities, but be critically certain that they are appropriate and free from potential for harming children or producing reactions from some that you might be unable to deal with.

Understand that these activities are to enhance pupils--their relaxation, integration, self-perceptions, self-understandings, feelings, sense of self-direction, security and rapport with you and with others. They can, through these, recognize both their uniqueness and the universality of their feelings. They might realize latent talents, capacities and abilities.

THREE PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC SCHOOLS

1. Ratio-Emotive Therapy:

Ellis, A. Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy. New York: Lyle Stewart, 1962.

2. Gestalt Therapy:

Perls, F. Ego, Hunger and Aggression: The Beginning of Gestalt Therapy. New York: Random House, 1947, 1969.

3. Cognitive-Behavior Modification:

Meichenbaum, D. Cognitive-Behavior Modification: An Integrative Approach. New York: Plenum, 1977.

SOME ASSORTED STRATEGIES

Breaking-in Technique [1] (Intermediate through College)

Method: One group (the "ins") stands in a circle, either looking inward--if "excluders" are involved with one another--or outward (if they are "gate-keeping"). One person at a time tries to break-in, any way he wishes without undue violence. In a group, S's form a tight circle with interlocking arms or hands. S's discuss thoughts and feelings after the activity. Leader may clarify, reflect, or interpret.

Rationale: To explore personal feelings of exclusion, isolation, loneliness, or alienation. Half-hearted, violent and/or guild-like approaches bring forth self-understanding and feelings of how one expresses these needs and one's reactions to rejection which could be revealing and productive of change in self-awareness and perception of others.

Fantasy Game [2] (Intermediate through College)

Method: S's asked for one volunteer to "do" something--read a book at home, go to chalk board and write an answer to question, or other similar duty. Then S's were told this was only "set up" to ask them to: "Imagine two persons inside your head. One is telling you to volunteer and the other, not to. Picture what they each look like and what they are saying. Who and why one finally wins. Tell us all about it in two minutes. Close your eyes and imagine what happens between these two people you are imagining."

8--Some Psychotherapeutic Schools..., Carl L. Rosen

Rationale: To help clarify the elements of "conflict," by personifying the parts; to develop increased internal awareness, understanding of, or insight into one's feelings, definite considerations involved in conflict, decision-making, feelings.

Circle Walk [3] (All ages)

Method: Asking all S's to slowly walk in a circle trying to feel as relaxed as possible. Then ask them to tense each designated body muscle, beginning with face and neck down to shoulders, chest, arms, hands, stomach, pelvis, upper legs, etc. Increase the tension as much as possible. Slowly relax, beginning with toes and proceeding upward step-by-step.

Rationale: Encourages interaction with others, togetherness, belonging, release of muscle tensions, resistance, fuller experiencing of situation, feeling relaxed, perhaps realizing degree of initial tension before experience.

Cognitive Restructuring: Faulty Problem-solving and Coping Skills [4] (Primary through College levels)

Method: Teacher identifies deficiency or absence of specific adaptive, cognitive, or affective skills or behavior paradigm and teaches for these self-instructional problem-solving skills. This teaching involves step-by-step (how to identify problem(s), generate possible solution(s); select a solution; test and verify its efficacy) problem-solving, verbal cognitively-based sequence for given situation(s). This might include parallel "coping" skill for recognizing self-doubts/frustration/low interest/anxiety.

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Rationale: Emphasis on formal cognitively-based logical systems through highly "directive" instruction, a sort of"engineering" of methodologies to deal with fundamental and basic sorts of problems (word recognition, comprehension, studying, theme-writing).

Encouraging Origin Behaviors [5] (Primary through College)

Method: Teachers encourage S's to: explore self-concepts, set realistic goals of achievement, plan how they will meet various goals they set (select own materials, set up personal schedules, design own self-evaluations, etc.) assume personal responsibility for monitoring their work, and for following their own plan; teachers help S's to: assume feelings of personal control, independent self-direction and confidence.

Rationale: S's who initiate their own behavior show intentioned responses, see themselves as the locus of causality for behavior and outcomes, are more intrinsically motivated, and as an "origin" rather than a "pawn," are more impelled to meet goals they set for change, more realistic in expectations and more regular in effort and attention.

Dyads [6](Intermediate through College)

Method: Individuals in a group are paired forming a two-person group (dyad). This two-person meeting (5 to 10 minutes) is to try to understand each other by "giving" and "taking" information about one another. Each expresses oneself, receives the experiences of the others and sees where the pair is alike and/or different. The "end" could be to describe each other for the big group.

Rationale: Foster communications, learn how to give and take, build positively with another, experience an inter-personal expressive mode, experience oneself while doing this and boost self-confidence.

Essence of Feelings Technique [7] (Primary through College)

Method: An individual alone, or a group of persons are asked to make believe an object they all have (a paper cup, piece of clay, drawing of a person) is a teacher--just for example-- or a book. Leader says, "Suppose that he (or it) was a paper cup. What would you do?"

Rationale: Clarifying feelings by converting a feeling into a physical action; externalization of the real object (teacher or book or assignment) allows feelings to come through, log-jams can be broken in repressed emotions, guilt and/or anxiety.

Modeling [8] (All ages)

Method: Teacher as "model" acts out/demonstrates step-by-step mastery behavior--could be of a reading, writing, study, organizational, and/or coping experience or task. Model could also think out loud as he/she performs demonstrating coping behavior, including facing and dealing with self-doubts/frustrations/low interest and others. Modeling situation could end with self-reinforcing statements on successful completion.

Rationale: Observer(s) convert(s) information from model to covert mental images; covert verbal and rehearsal responses are acquired, which are useful later for overt behavior. Observer acquires a set of self-instructions from model's physical, verbal, and affect demonstration, talks out what he sees, expresses feelings about his own confidence and problems.

Self-analysis of Listening Behavior [9] (Jr. High through College)

Method: S's asked to self-examine as listeners. They write descriptions of their body position, feelings while listening to a speaker, where their eyes were, position and movements of hands,

mouth, feet, lips, how tense or relaxed they were, how their thoughts focused or wandered, what they thought about, preoccupations, etc. After the writing, S's engage in conversation about situations expressing what they wrote about themselves and what it means.

Rationale: Expanding self-awareness by focusing on things happening within self pertaining to feelings, habits, styles of listening, reactions person has on others and one's receptivity for communications.

Shifting External for Internal Control Statements [10] (Intermediate through College)

Method: Teachers conduct sessions where S's are: confronted with questions (after a test, a recitation, an assignment is returned, etc.) such as, "What did you want to do?" and "What could you have done about it?" Then, these internal thoughts are transferred to future events by using present and future tense (now that he knows what he could have done, what will he do in the future?) In later sessions, S's are helped to replace external control--reflecting statements with internal ones. ("I am trying hard because my parents," to: "I am trying to improve because I want to read better.")

Rationale: S's who are aware of their own goals and motivations to achieve know and are more interested in what they do, are doing, are more a part of their efforts, can be relied on more, are less in need of teacher attention and actually model after these types of questions.

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3. Ibid., p. 40.
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5. deCharms, R. "Personal Causation Training in the Schools," Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 1972 (2), 95-113.
6. Schutz, W., op. cit., p. 80.
7. Ibid., p. 75.
8. Bandura, A. Principles of Behavior Modification, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969.
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